The "Friendly" Factor: Identity and the Decision Making Processes of Prospective Students to North Central College

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Statement of the Problem

College. This little word has caused a great deal of stress for many high school seniors. The process of deciding where to attend includes researching, applying to, visiting, and having many conversations about various schools. It is a complex and overwhelming process. Many factors influence high school students as they seek out the place to continue their education. Sometimes a school grabs a student’s attention due to the recommendation of a friend or family member. Other times this interest is sparked by a visit to campus, materials received in the mail, interactions with the website, or meeting students, faculty, or staff.

The role of an admission office on a college campus is to recruit and evaluate students for admission to their institution. It is also the goal of admission offices to find students who “fit” their institution. This goal is in place because students will be more likely to stay until graduation if they are aware of what it will be like to attend school there and feel comfortable at the institution.

When recruiting students, some institutions focus on students possessing a certain talent or going into a specific type of major. Columbia College in Chicago, for example, has a focus on the “visual, performing, media, and communication arts” (Columbia College, 2010, ¶ 2). Ivy League schools such as Harvard or Yale look for “the best and brightest students” (Symonds, 2006, ¶ 1) and are very selective regarding SAT scores and GPA. Other institutions look heavily at student’s high school GPA and ACT score in order to decide if they will be successful at their institution. Without an admission office in place, a college or university could find itself with a disjointed and perhaps small student body. As the office on a college campus in charge of the
important job of recruiting and selecting of future students they must provide resources for
students to gain information and an understanding of the school overall.

There are many resources an admission office uses to engage prospective students in their
college search. Although those available differ from school to school, some of the common
ways schools connect with and influence students in the college search include frequent
communication with students. This communication includes personally inviting students to
campus, calling student’s homes, emailing them, and meeting one-on-one on campus. The goal
of this communication is to answer questions and provide information about the school and
includes emails, phone calls, and materials sent through the mail. Further, welcoming
prospective students to campus for individual meetings is typical. During these visits a current
student shows a prospective student and their family around campus and an admission counselor
sits down with them to discuss various attributes of the school and answer individual questions.
Visit days are many times the avenue students initially physically experience college campuses.
They, along with their families, are invited to attend a program with many other students and
families on the same day to see campus and hear from faculty and staff. Admission offices
provide students with materials on the school via packets in the mail and counselors act as
mentors through the application, financial aid, and enrollment processes.

Over the last ten years, admission offices across the country have taken steps to keep up
with technological influences on society and on the students they are recruiting (Lipka, 2009, ¶
1). A “majority of teens (71%) have established online profiles (including those on social
networking sites such as MySpace, Friendster and Xanga), up from 61% in 2006” (Computer
Monitoring Solutions, 2010, p. 1). Many institutions have responded to this social-network
phenomenon by using online tools to recruit students. “A survey of 536 colleges in the fall of
2008 found that 41 percent of admissions offices kept blogs and 61 percent maintained social-networking profiles” (Lipka, 2009, ¶ 3). These are examples of an addition to the resources offered by institutions to students. It intends to reach a wider audience and is a response to the way students currently attain much of their information, thus making the college more effective in its promotions.

Further, according to National Association for College Admission Counseling (NACAC), “more than half (53 percent) of colleges monitor social media for ‘buzz’ about their institution” (NACAC, 2009, ¶ 3). This shows that colleges are also gaining information in technologically savvy ways, utilizing social networking resources to target prospective students.

For example, two years ago North Central College (NCC) in Naperville, IL, a private liberal-arts school with nearly 2500 undergraduate students, began inviting students who had been accepted to the college to sign up on a social networking website entitled “Be The Bird.” They hoped that this website would give students the opportunity to connect with others searching for colleges, specifically those looking at North Central, and were one of the forerunners in this kind of technology. Be the Bird was also designed to get students more comfortable with the school and with communicating with Admission Counselors. Be The Bird is NCC’s response to the social-network phenomenon and is an attempt to recruit students using the form of communication with which they are most comfortable.

Butler University in Marion, Indiana has about 3,900 undergraduates and has recently also taken steps to use electronic communication as a method for reaching prospective students. This institution has opted to use Zinch, an online tool for college recruitment. Through Zinch, students “set up profiles…that are more than just their names and test scores. They can list extracurricular activities…if they’re a first-generation student…or their ethnicity” (Briggs, 2008,
With this information from the students, Butler is able to target certain students they’d like to reach. Further, Butler has found that on Zinch there has been an increase in recruiting numbers, with an “open rate” of 35 percent of messages sent via the tool, compared to only 11-13 percent for email blasts (Briggs, 2008, p. 2).

College’s main websites also exists to fulfill the need for accessible information to students. Many have opportunities for prospective students to look at a list of all majors and minors, extracurricular activities, and virtual campus tours. This allows students interested in attending college to initially compare schools based on the information touted on each institution’s main website. Further, it has been proven that this resource is helpful not only for prospective students, but also as a way for families to gain information on an institution. Throughout the college search process parents, like their children, use websites of colleges and universities in order to get a better picture of what each institution has to offer and in order to compare it to other schools.

It is difficult to tell what is most helpful as prospective students make their decision with the various ways to gain information during the college search. One must understand which resources students use while selecting the college they will eventually attend as well as specifically analyze the resources students feel are most influential on this decision. In order to understand the resources used, however, one must first know how high school seniors identify themselves and how social identity influences them when going through the decision-making process of selecting a college.

This thesis will analyze the college search process and the factors that affect high school students while attempting to choose where to attend college, looking specifically at the role of an
admission office. It will also attempt to define whether a student’s identity or feeling of “fit” at an institution has an impact on a student’s overall college decision.
Social Identity Theory

Social identity theory is helpful in setting up the framework to analyze how identity is formed and how identity affects an individual’s decisions. Originally developed by Tajfel and Turner, social identity suggests individuals instinctively categorize their social world into “us” and “them,” or in-groups and out-groups. “Individuals strive for a positive self-concept and maintain and enhance their self-esteem through their memberships in social groups” (Saw & Okazaki, 2008, ¶ 1). The groups an individual identifies with and the influence each group has overall allows development of self-concept among its individuals.

“The self is reflexive in that it can take itself as an object and can categorize, classify, or name itself in particular ways in relation to other social categories or classifications” (Stets & Burke, 2000, p.226). Each person has the capacity to think of themselves as part of many social groups at any given time. The conglomeration of these groups allows individuals to see their own identity as a composite of the groups. “Social identity theory conceptualization is one involving extension of the self beyond the level of the individual” (Brewer, 1991, p. 478). A person regards him/herself in terms of the groups he/she is part of. These groups can include one’s school, participation in sports, neighborhood, work title or environment.

It is through these “extensions of self” into social groups, including coming to know the values of each, interactions one has with the people of that group, and the overall group mentality and culture, where identity finds its breeding ground. “Through this process, called self-categorization in social identity theory, an identity is formed.” (Stets & Burke, 2000, p.226). Self-categorization is an important part of social identity as it is the process through which self is compared with the in-group members as well as the out-group members and similarities and
differences are perceived. “It occurs for all the attitudes, beliefs and values, affective reactions, behavioral norms, styles of speech, and other properties that are believed to be correlated with the relevant intergroup categorization” (Stets & Burke, 2000, p. 227) All aspects of an individual’s identity are evaluated in order to comprehend commonalities with the group overall, allowing that individual to better recognize his/her own identity attributes as well as derive his/her identity or sense of self largely from the social categories to which they belong (Stets & Burke, 2000, p. 227).

An individual does not form his/her identity by accident. “Membership may be voluntary or imposed, but social identities are chosen. Individuals may recognize that they belong to any number of social groups without adopting those classifications as social identities” (Brewer, 1991, p. 477). Social identities are selected from a number of self-categorization options available. At times certain group identities are utilized more often than others and some groups may only be temporary as well.

Social identity theory does not intend to say that each group brainwashes its members. “The group is a set of interrelated individuals, each of whom performs unique but integrated activities, sees things from his or her own perspective, and negotiates the terms of interaction” (Stets & Burke, 2000, p. 228). Further, the “individual acts in terms of his or her own goals and desires rather than as a member of a group but perceive their motivations and perspectives to be psychologically interchangeable with those of others who share the same social identity” (Turner, 1982, p. 17). If an individual identifies with a certain group, the decisions made will be similar to those other members of the group would have also made. This is when social identity becomes salient, or an identity is activated in a situation. Put another way, saliency is reached when “one…is functioning psychologically to increase the influence of one’s membership in that
group on perception and behavior” (Oakes, 1987, p. 118). This is important because it reveals the point in time when an individual takes on the psychological position and behaviors of the group in order to perpetuate the group identity overall. Saliency is the point in time when an individual is still striving towards his/her own desires but making decisions within the framework of a certain in-group to which s/he belongs. Social identity is seen as achieved at the times when an individual psychologically takes on the characteristics of a group and his/her self-concept becomes associated with his/her membership in that particular social group (Turner, 1982, p. 22).

Such a process creates an opportunity for self-esteem development. This happens because “collective identities buffer the individual from many threats to self-worth” (Brewer, 1991, p. 481). An individual will perceive others in the group as having many similarities and make upcoming decisions based on this standard, thus reinforcing his/her self-esteem when reaffirmed by others in this group.

Social identity salience holds the capability to develop more in-depth attributes of identity:

Among other things, social identity salience leads group members (a) to perceive their ingroup as relatively homogeneous and cohesive (on group-related dimensions), (b) to develop a shared perspective on social reality, (c) to expect, and prove capable of, mutual influence, and (d) to act concertedly in the pursuit of group goals. (Haslam, et al, 2000, p. 194).

Once salience is achieved, an individual perceives themselves as having very similar understandings and opinions to the other members of the group. Individuals believe the
decisions that are made regarding the group will benefit it as a whole. Further, salience leads group members to relate outside experiences to the group overall and react to them accordingly.

Overall, social identity theory is a good framework for understanding group membership affect on individual identity as well as its effect on decision making. Now we will explore self-concept development looking specifically at teenager’s process of identity and it’s correlation with social identity theory as well as teenage decision-making.

Identity Development and Decision-Making

Identity development is a complicated process seen throughout a person’s life, but scholars agree it goes through the most dramatic changes revealed during the teenage years. (Landon 1974; Iyengar 2010; Klimstra, et.al. 2010; Osit 2008). Across disciplines, identity development is seen as encompassing the ways a person wants to be perceived by others as well as how one views themselves and is commonly referred to as development of self. “The self is what one is aware of, one’s attitudes, feelings perceptions, and evaluations of oneself as an object” (Landon, 1974, p.24). All the ways an individual regards specific attributes of themselves are what defines that individuals identity.

Developing identity is at times an excuse given for the behavior of rebellious teenagers. Iyengar (2010), however, believes, “We think of the process of finding ourselves as a personal excavation” (p.75). The teenage years are a time when the discovery of oneself becomes a focus, and at times it is misconstrued by outsiders as intentional rebelliousness. This discovery of self is a process of deep intimacy, constantly sought after by teenagers and adults alike, striving to find fulfillment and satisfaction in life through understanding themselves and how to interact with their environment.
An adolescent’s identity can be classified into four distinguishable identity statuses at any given time based on two variables: exploration of identity and commitment towards an identity, or engaging in activities that reaffirm a certain identity (Marcia, 1966, p. 552). These four statuses include “diffusion (low in exploration and low on commitment), foreclosure (little exploration, but strong commitments), moratorium (high on exploration, but no stable commitments as yet), and achievement (high on commitment after a period of extensive exploration)” (Klimstra, et.al., 2010, p. 150). Moratorium is the status of focus in regard to an individual searching to claim an identity. It is the longest state, one of much discovery while searching for the groups in which an individual feels consistently reaffirmed.

Adolescents go through each of these stages in order to successfully understand their own identity and this process can take a large amount of time. The moratorium is the stage where teenagers spend most of their time as they search for and develop a better understanding of themselves and how they relate to the world around them. Furthermore, adolescents are strongly influenced during this stage because they are in the process of exploration and discovery, making choices not based on identity, but instead on the experience it will give them because they have no commitment to a certain identity yet.

Once a strong self-concept is achieved everything possible is done in order to hold onto its stability. “Once we have developed a coherent identity for ourselves, we preemptively avoid dissonance by choosing in ways that reinforce it” (Iyengar, 2010, p.98). Identity influences the decisions a person makes as they attempt to consistently reaffirm overall group goals “Whether we do it consciously or subconsciously, we tend to organize our lives to display our identity as accurately as possible” (Iyengar, 2010, p.104). This display can be seen in the clothes a person wears, activities they partake in, location of a home, and career choice.
Social identity theory is an important key to understanding self-concept overall because identity is influenced by the environment surrounding a person. “The self develops not as a personal, individual process, but it evolves through the process of social experience. From the reactions of others, man develops his self-perception” (Landon, 1974, p.24) It would be impossible to develop a sense of self without the input of other people and the specific groups a person associates with. Through daily interactions it is understood what is acceptable, including how to act, the opinions a person holds, and what is of importance. Decisions are influenced by self-concept, which, in turn, is influenced by group membership:

Because the self-concept is of value and of central importance to the individual, he will direct his behavior to maintain and enhance his self-concept. The self-concept is formed in the interaction process between the individual and others; therefore, the individual will strive for self-enhancement in the interaction process (Landon, 1974, p. 26).

Striving to reinforce identity through the decisions allows a person to find or remain in good-standing with a community of people who think similarly.

Another important aspect of analyzing identity is schema, or “the scientific term for what is best described as an internal self-portrait,” (Osit, 2008, p.20). Schema is more focused on self-perception than how others perceive a person and is an internalized conglomeration of all of the messages a person receives over their lifetime. Schema can furthermore be thought of as the framework or lens through which to see the world: based on what a person has experienced in the past, they will perceive themselves as well as all of their future experiences in a certain way.

Coming to an understanding of individual identity requires selection of various groups, moving through the steps of identity formation, group salience, and an overall development of
schema. While aspects of identity change over a person’s lifetime, one’s identity at any given time affects the decisions that are made, future group participation, and purchasing decisions.

**Identity and Consumerism**

An individual gains identity through involvement within certain groups. With the understanding that decisions are, in fact, influenced by identity, it becomes clear that this same psychological construct of self-concept also influences consumer behavior (Landon, 1974, p. 23). The decisions a person makes in regards to what they will purchase are not free from their self-concept. “Your choices of which clothes to wear or which soda to drink, where you live, which school to attend and what to study, and of course your profession all say something about you, and it’s your job to make sure that they are an accurate reflection of who you really are” (Iyengar, 2010, p. 75). Decisions made in the past, the perception of a certain brand or product, as well how certain groups with which an individual is involved in views the particular buying decisions all continue to have influence over future consumer choices.

This same comparison is made by Grubb (1965) who argues

…the symbolic social classification of a good allows the consumer to relate himself directly to it, matching his self-concept with the meaning of the good. In this way self-support and self-enhancement can take place through association with goods which have a desirable social meaning and from the favorable reaction of significant references in the social interaction process (p. 424).

Items, goods, and other “purchases” made by consumers are bought because they seem to be desirable to that individual. Just because a person is in a particular group does not necessarily
mean they must buy an item, but instead, group influence increases their propensity towards certain items or brands of items.

The subject of consumerism and teens yields much interest and research from scholars. This dynamic is interesting because many times their parents are covering the costs of necessities but the teens still hold part-time jobs, allowing them to spend that income on themselves. Generally they have $5,000 per year in disposable income, or money they can spend how they would like (Zmuda, 2009, ¶ 2).

Consumers come to know about a products image through their marketing. According to Dolich (1969) “marketing strategies that are successful in establishing perceived psychological values for product brands seem to develop product acceptance or rejection by the similarity of these values to the self concept” (p. 84). Based on what a consumer knows about a product, and the characteristics seen in marketing campaigns, an individual decides if that product fits with their self-concept.

In a study done by Chaplin and John (2005), it was found that “as children move into adolescence, self-brand connections increase as brands are viewed as being connected to one's self-concept because the brand has the same personality, user characteristics, or reference group affiliation” (p. 127). Adolescents not only increase their “connection” to specific brands, but also use that brand to help define their individual traits and group statuses. In the context of social identity theory, this means that adolescents are beginning to make decisions based on the groups with which they have achieved salience. The products that are bought are included in these decisions and reaffirm the group’s overall identity. Teens seek congruence between self-image, reached through an understanding of identity through the lens of group participation, and product brands an individual is purchasing. The fact that teens are in the middle of developing
this identity makes them exceptionally vulnerable to buying into what brands promise via marketing campaigns.

**Consumerism, Identity, and the College Search Process**

College, like any other product, is one through which consumers seek congruence with self-image (Landon, 1974, p. 44). The process of college selection is similar to making a choice about other purchases and is influenced by self-concept based on group identity. Traditionally teens are the main consumers of college and so the fact that the process of identity development is still taking place is important. During this process a student’s perceived identity influences which colleges they will begin to look at as well as their overall decision.

The groups students identify with during their college search prove to be influential. In a study on parental influence during the college search researchers found that it is “especially strong early in the process, when many parents are likely to guide the conversation around decision criteria” (Enrollment Management Learning Collaborative, 2009, p. 6). Students are influenced by parental opinions, especially initially, because their families define a large part of the student’s identity. As the process continues, students look for opportunities provided by specific schools that align with what they foresee themselves becoming in the future. Serpe and Stryker (1987) find that students look for new relationships by seeking out and joining organizations that provide opportunities to behave in accord with highly salient identities held prior to entrance. “When they succeed in doing so, their self-structures remain stable; changes in the salience of their identities occur when they are unable to find or use such opportunities” (Serpe & Stryker, 1987, p. 63). Students continue to attempt to reaffirm previous identity characteristics even as they are part of a new group, the college which they attend.
The concept of “fit” and how it affects consumers has become increasingly important in the area of college marketing. Perhaps this is because the extended length of time students will spend on a college campus or because there are so many institutions to choose from. Whatever the reason, “fit” was best understood as perception or attribution when all other qualifications are considered equal (Tooms et al., 2010, p. 103). While difficult to define, the feeling of “fit” is very commonly used by students during the college search process.

**College Selection Research**

The factors of both identity and fit are shown to have an influence on students as they make their college decision. Within these areas other specific factors are acknowledged as well. The Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) published a study (Pryor et al., 2005, p. 3) that indicated that first-generation students, students whose parents have no college experience, are more likely to stay closer to home. In a later study, it was found that “the distance traveled to attend college was demonstrated to be strongly associated not only with students’ demographic characteristics but also with academic preparation, and even by the student’s home state” (Mattern & Wyatt, 2009, p. 28). This insight reaffirms that students are using the groups they are involved in currently to help make their college decisions. Further, a survey done in 1986 with admitted graduate students at a major research university found the following characteristics were likely to influence decision: “residency status, quality and other academic environment characteristics, work-related concerns, spouse considerations, financial aid, and the campus social environment” (Kallio, 1995, p.109). Each of these define groups students are members of prior to salience within the campus environment, each group having it’s own set of expectations.
and needs. This information reveals that factors of these groups are, in fact, influencing a prospective student’s decision to attend.

It is apparent what students look for at an institution as well as what outside factors they are affected by. It is not necessarily obvious, though, how they gain that information and what resources they find most helpful during this process. Prior research does not specifically address how the “fit,” or the feeling of identifying closely to a campus culture affects student’s choice, however. The information gathered for this study tries to better understand both the process and “fit” a bit better.
Method

Over the last few years, there has been increased attention given to the college admission process overall (NCAC, 2010, ¶ 4) and specific attention has been given to the increase in the use of social-networking to recruit students, as “thirty-three percent of admissions offices kept blogs in 2007, and 29 percent maintained social-networking profiles” (Social Media in Admissions, 2009, ¶ 5). The effectiveness of these tools has not been studied nor has there been a comparison of the effectiveness of these social networking tools to other tools employed in the recruitment efforts of admission offices.

This study will attempt to gain insight on student’s selection process in deciding which school to attend, which resources they use, and of these resources, which were most helpful to their decision to attend NCC. Furthermore, this research will look at what extent the appearance of “fit” influences the decision to attend one institution over another, including how a student’s identity as well as how they see a school influences this choice. Ultimately, this project seeks to answer the following questions:

RQ1: What is the process NCC students go through to make their college selection decision?

RQ1a: What resources did these students use to make their decision?

RQ2: To what extent does identity of a student and a school’s identity, or “fit,” influence a student’s college decision?

North Central College

The population for this study, first year students at North Central College in Naperville, Illinios, comprise a very homogenous group. North Central College is a private, four-year, liberal arts college with nearly 2,500 undergraduate students. About 56% of students live on NCC’s 59-acre campus located in Naperville, IL, 30 miles west of Chicago. Students come from 31 states but 88% of all students are from Illinois. Students also represent 23 foreign countries
and a 13% minority population is seen on campus, with 20 nonresident aliens, 79 black students, 73 Asian or Pacific Islander students, and 106 Hispanic students in the 2008-2009 first-year student class.

The fall of 2009 incoming student profile stated that students came from 35 counties with 22% from DuPage, 16% from Will, and 15% from Cook. North Central is located in DuPage county and Will and Cook counties are its neighbors to the south and west respectively. 66% of these students report belonging to a religion of some sort, with 8% specifically identifying themselves as believers in the United Methodist church. Finally, the top 3 high schools students in the first-year class of 2009 hail from are Naperville Central HS and Naperville North HS, both with 3% of the total first-year students, and Plainfield Central HS, with 2% of the first-year students.

As can be seen from the snapshot of two years worth of first-year class information, North Central is a fairly homogenous group overall. While diversity exists, it does not to an overwhelming extent. Many students are from similar backgrounds, including racial, religious, and they types of communities they hail from.

**Methodological Rationale**

In order to answer these questions, this study relies on quantitative survey methods to understand the process of and justifications for college selection. Quality research chooses appropriate methods for a given research question, often combining various disciplinary approaches to address a given problem (Schneider, 2006, p. 391). In putting together original research, it was important to understand exactly what information was desired as well as the methods appropriate to solicit such data. Quantitative methods are better suited to the gathering
of information regarding the resources prospective students use during their college search process.

Quantitative research, as the name implies, measures variables (size, frequency, and intensity) and is more interested in generalizing across context than qualitative work. Both kinds of work rely on description (albeit descriptions of different kinds): Qualitative work tends to be interpretive, whereas quantitative work usually examines relationships between or among variables (Benoit, 2008, p.622).

A quantitative study provides the best framework for examining the specific process students go through as well as how this process affects their college decision. Such methods solicit information from a large group of participants and can be analyzed to understand the general consensus from the group. Quantitative research will allow me, as a researcher, to track trends among opinions and gain information in such a way that very specific outcomes can be compared in order to discover if relationships between pieces of data exist. The information received will be evaluated with an objective lens. Quantitative method focuses on how the data is impacted and where certain relationships exist

Surveying

Survey research, because of its ability to generalize data and prevalence in research overall, is the technique most familiar among nonprofit scholars (Schneider, 2006, p.387). It is seen among those doing independent research within both education and student affairs. Such groups employ surveys because of their many benefits. First, research yields very specific responses which are quantifiable and easily compared statistically. The benefit for this particular question is that I will be able to compare each student to the other in the sample and make
generalizations across the populations. Second, surveys allow researchers to isolate specific demographics within samples, therefore highlighting specific patterns and allowing researchers to gain more accurate data through their research.

Finally, because I am hoping to draw generalized conclusions about the process prospective students to North Central went through when deciding on a college, it will be helpful to have many responses to the exact same questions. The benefit of using one survey is that consistency of wording and ordering of questions exists, so all participants have the same experience. This written form allows each individual to participate in the research without taking up too much time, with the capability to complete it on his/her own time schedule, while maintaining consistency in the questions. This is important in order to preserve control on outside factors which otherwise have the capability of skewing data.

**Online Surveys**

Because my research questions benefit from a larger participant pool, conducting the survey online seemed to be an efficient way to go about doing research in this particular situation. The researcher does not need to be present at the time the survey is being completed, allowing quick distribution and convenience to participate. Focus is put on analyzing the results instead of on the collection of that data, which could prove to be time-consuming and tedious. An online survey is easy to access, can be filled out at their leisure, and their answers will give insight regarding the specific hypothesis for this research.

Web surveys have other unique benefits as well. One primary benefit of this survey is that respondents can complete the instrument at their leisure (Churchill & Iacobucci, 2002). Online surveys can be sent out to many people consecutively and respondents may provide data whenever convenient with a few simple clicks of the mouse. Further, they eliminate the need for
interviewers, sharply reducing the cost of data collection as compared to telephone and face-to-face interviews (Tourangeau, 2004, p. 792). The sample size can easily be very large with a survey and more comprehensive data will be gained through it. Results, however, will take the same amount of time to gather, whether there are 40 or 400 participants, because they complete it on their own time. Further, it is not uncommon for a college student to be asked to participate in such a study. This is probably because a college campus inhabits a very specific demographic and many factors are kept stable: all students are going through the relatively same experiences around the same point in their lives.

**Project Sample**

Selective sampling was used for the population of this study: only first-year students were contacted for participation in this research, but every member of the first-year class was invited to participate. I was not expecting that all students would respond, and will include all completed responses in my analysis. The goal was to have a random cross-section of the population, or at least as best as can be gathered through volunteer participants. Volunteers may choose to participate for a number of reasons including the opportunity to have their voice heard, to help out a fellow student, or because they enjoy filling out surveys. There is no way verify the sample represented every opinion or group membership held by the first-year class but for the purpose of the study I will assume it to be a random sample of the larger first-year population. Each respondent is assumed to have gone through a common experience of completing their college search within the last year and is a first year at North Central when taking the survey. Even though not every person completed the survey, we will assume that the students who chose to participate reflect the overall opinions of most first-year students.
This specific demographic was asked to participate because of their recent involvement with the college search process and, specifically, the Office of Admission on campus. They are more likely than upperclassmen to remember when they made their final decision to attend NCC and have not had as much physical time away from high school, therefore more likely to identify more with themselves as high school seniors.

First-year students from the directory at North Central College (NCC) were sent an email at the conclusion of winter term asking for participation in the survey attached within the email (see Appendix B). Every student has access to the internet and an email address through North Central and so would not have difficulty accessing the request to participate or the survey itself. Specifically at North Central, students are commonly asked to fill out surveys, so it would not be a surprise for students to receive another survey opportunity in their email.

The email I sent the pool of participants specifically asked for their help with my thesis. In the same email, I motivated them to participate by both framing the survey as important to recruiting future students of NCC and an opportunity for them to express their opinions regarding their own college search process. There was no reward offered, but I hoped that the incentives of helping with important research and an outlet to reflect and express opinions on the matter would be enough motivation for nearly 20% of the population to complete the survey (See Appendix A). Students gave consent to use the information they anonymously provided by clicking on the link to the survey in the email they received.

The survey was distributed at the beginning of the second term, after winter break. This timing could lead to the possibility that the responses are skewed or biased. It has been almost a year since the participants actually made the decision to attend North Central and so it would be easy to identify aspects of the search incorrectly. Further, this period of time allows first-year
students to be fully integrated as part of the campus. However, this demographic still remains the best population to survey because they have gone through the process most recently.

**NCC College Selection Survey Description**

Surveymonkey.com, a free online product, was the tool I used to create the format of the survey as well as collect information from students. The survey was provided to students via a link to its unique website. Surveymonkey.com ensures anonymity for participants and neither their name nor email address can be tied to participants answers.

The first question on the survey asks the participant to choose the words from a list of adjectives that describe them. The list of words used was taken from a Pearson Prentice Hall survey (Appendix C). The adjectives used encompass many different personalities and characteristics. While not exhaustive, it is a well-rounded, comprehensive selection that allowed flexibility, yet stability for the survey overall. This same list is used for the end of the survey which asks the participant to choose the words that describe North Central and its faculty, staff, students and culture. Using the same list for both questions will allow an analysis of how the data generated compares to one another in order to analyze if there is a correlation between a student’s perceived identity and that of the institution they decide to attend.

Most of the other questions included in the questionnaire aim to understand the resources students relied on the most in order to make their college decision (see Appendix B). It first asks students to identify whether they visited campus before they applied and, if they did, the activities they participated in during this visit. Further, if a student did not visit prior to applying to NCC, s/he is asked to list the resources they depended on in order to decide to apply. Both of these questions seek to understand how students gain the information necessary to know if North Central was an institution which was worth the investment of an application. It goes on to ask
students to rank specific resources that proved especially helpful in their decision to apply to NCC.

The second half of the survey seeks to understand the resources a student used after applying in order to determine how they made the final decision to attend NCC. A question asking about visits to campus and the activities a student participated in following submission of an application is followed by a question regarding the top five resources that most influenced their final decision to be an NCC student.

The survey moves on to focus on how a student’s choice was made, specifically asking how many total times the student visited campus prior to orientation in order to see if students typically used multiple visits to campus to help make a final decision. It also asks students to describe, using their own words, why they chose to attend NCC and when this decision was made. This information will reveal what the student remembers to be the most important part of their decision.

Finally, following the question regarding adjectives describing NCC’s culture, the survey uses a qualitative approach and concludes upon asking each participant to describe why they felt North Central was a good fit for them. This question was included in order to gain a broad look at student’s general opinions on the school as well as to create an outlet to hear more general opinions on participant’s feeling of “fit: at NCC.

Survey Responses

124 first-year students of the 544 invited actually participated and 105 completed the surveys in their entirety. The data from the 19 incomplete surveys will be thrown out so the number of participants remains the same for each question answered.
I analyzed which resources are most commonly used prior to applying and which resources are most commonly used after applying. Data from the surveys also revealed which resources students felt were most helpful throughout their college search and when students made their final decision. Finally, I examined the data to find out to what extent the characteristics they chose for themselves were similar to the ones they chose for the culture at NCC, revealing to what extent “fit” played into this choice.

The first step in analysis was focused on determining if an individual’s description of their own identity matched the characteristics they felt NCC’s people and culture exhibited. To do this, I looked at the characteristics each participant chose for themselves and compared it to their choice for NCC and determined what percent were the same. After completing this comparison for each participant, I took an average of this percentage in order to determine to what degree this phenomenon existed. Further using the information regarding identity, I looked at the data as a whole and determined the five characteristics participants chose most often to describe themselves and also to describe North Central, comparing them to see if a correlation exists overall between the two.

Next I analyzed the process and resources used by students when making their decision to visit and attend NCC. First I determined how many participants visited prior to applying to North Central. It was then necessary to compile what percentage of this group used each resource while on campus. For those who did not come to campus prior to applying, I then determined which resources they employed to see whether there is a trend regarding which resources are used the most. Further, I compiled all answers to question ranking student’s top five resources to determine which resources they felt most influenced them overall as a group.
This same process was then started over regarding student’s interaction with the Office of Admission after turning in an application. I determined how many student visited campus after applying and what percentage of this group used each resource during this time. Then I looked at the top resources students thought influenced their decision to attend North Central College and compared these answers to the student’s answers who visited prior to applying to see if any relationship existed. The next step of analysis was simply looking at the percentage of participants that visited once, two to three times, four to five times, and more than six to gain an understanding of how many times current students came to campus prior to Orientation.

Two of the last three questions on the survey gave students the opportunity to comment on the process. The answers from each of these were carefully looked at in order to see if a pattern existed among participants.
Results

Overall analysis of the data gained from the survey revealed trends of the resources students use and also how self-concept affects the decision to attend a particular institution. These results revealed the prevalence of campus visits in order to make a decision to apply and their influence on a student’s ultimate decision to attend NCC. Further, this data shows that similarities between how students identify themselves and how they identify North Central overall exist. Finally, students are visiting frequently before arriving on campus for orientation.

In this section I will first preview the resources students reported using during their college search process, including when students visited, how many times, and the resources they used before and after applying. Then I will reveal students answers regarding adjectives they used to describe individual characteristics and those of the school overall.

Resources

According to data from the surveys, NCC students go through a very similar college search process and utilized common resources to make their college decision. The vast majority, 81.9% of students, visited before applying to North Central College. Of those students, 55.2% came to campus for an individual visit and 38.1% came on a visit day, with 61% of students who said that they had a tour of campus during their visit to campus before applying (see Figure 1).
Furthermore, students who did not visit campus before applying used a number of other resources to decide to apply. 84% of students who did not visit prior to applying used the North Central website to gain information while 68% used materials received in the mail, 60% used conversations with family and 40% used conversations with friends (see Figure 2).
When asked to rank the resources that were most influential to apply to North Central, 33.3% ranked a campus tour in their top 5 resources, 31.4% ranked an individual visit in their top 5, and 17.6% ranked the website in their top 5 resources used to decide to apply.

Similar results were generated when looking specifically at students who visited North Central after applying, whether it was a return visit to campus or their first time. Overall, 78.8% of participants visited sometime after turning in an application. Of these students, 60.3% had a tour of campus, with 57.7% coming for an individual visit and 47.4% coming on a visit day. Further, 26.9% of students who visited campus met with a professor, 23.1% sat in on a class, and 21.8% met with a coach (see Figure 3).

When students were asked to choose the 5 resources that most influenced their decision to attend North Central, the top 5 chosen included a tour of campus, with 63.1% of participants choosing it as one of their 5, as well as an individual visit at 60.2%, a visit day at 47.6%, conversations with family at 43.7%, and the North Central website, at 41.8%.
Just as important are the resources the fewest number of participants chose as being most influential to come to NCC. It is unclear, however, if these resources were simply utilized by fewer students or if they prove to be the least helpful. They include emailing with a coach and meeting with a college representative at a local college fair, both at 2.9%, as well as a call with a current student at 4.9% or a call with a coach at 5.8%.

Overall, 58.7% of students reported visiting between 2-3 times before coming to orientation, 28.8% report visiting at least once, and 12.5% report visiting at least 4 times. There may be a slight error in the response to the question regarding number of visits before orientation, however, because 0 visits was not an answer option. Only one student skipped this question, it is assumed that this student never visited campus prior to orientation. Because students did not have the option to choose that they had never been to campus before Orientation, they may have chosen one of the other options just to get through to the remainder of the survey (see Figure 4).

**Figure 4: Number of Visits to Campus Prior to Orientation**
The Friendly Factor: Identity and the Decision Making Processes of Prospective Students to NCC 33

Identity

The second research question, looking at the extent to which a student’s identity and a school's identity, or fit, influences college choice, yielded interesting results as well. The very first question included in the survey asked students to “choose the words that describe you.” With 57 adjectives to choose from, on average participants chose 20.1 of these adjectives to describe themselves, 35.1% of all adjectives in the list.

The top five adjectives chosen include friendly, dependable, kind, helpful, and achieving. Specifically, 85 out of 105 participants, or 78%, chose friendly; 71 or 67.6% chose dependable; 67 participants or 63.8% chose kind; 65 participants or 61.9% chose helpful; 62 participants of 105, or 59% of participants chose achieving as a word that describes them (see Figure 5).

To gauge student’s perception of the school’s identity, a question at the end of the survey asked students to “choose the words that describe North Central and its faculty, staff,
students, and culture.” The same list of 57 adjectives was then listed as choices for this question and on average participants chose 19.4 of them, or 34% of all possible adjectives.

The top five adjectives chosen include friendly, again the number one most-chosen adjective, with 77 participants or 74% of the participant population; helpful, with 73 participants or 70.2%; intellectual, with 69 participants or 66.3%; “achieving” and understanding, each with 68 participants or 65.4%; and confident, with 67 participants or 64.4% (see Figure 6).

Furthermore, students were asked why they feel NCC is a good fit for them and they were given an opportunity to respond in their own words instead of choosing from a list. A small error in collecting this data is seen because this question assumes that every student at North Central College in fact feels like it is a good “fit.” In their comments four students revealed this error, saying somehow that they did not agree that NCC is a good fit for them.
For the students who do feel like they “fit” at NCC, 39% revealed that it was because the size of the school, referring either to the campus on the whole or their small class sizes. Following this lead were connections to people on campus, such as professors, staff, or students, (24.8%), academics (21%), location (17.1%), and environment or atmosphere of the campus (11.4%). The top five answers described in response to this question reveal that students at North Central overall appreciate the physical aspects of the campus, academic programs they are involved in, and the people they interact with at the institution.

Finally, some of the data collected attempts to understand when a student chose to attend North Central and why they made that decision. Many students avoided answering when they made their final decision to attend, with only 49 of 105 participants willing to give this information. Of these 49 participants, however, 24 decided in the spring of their senior year, during the months of March, April, or May. Interestingly enough, 6 students claimed that they made the decision immediately upon visiting North Central. This strong statement supports the data previously found saying that 63.1% of students found a campus tour most helpful in making their decision to attend North Central.

When asked for students to specifically identify why they chose to come to North Central, they typically identified the location of the school as most important to them (52.4%). Academics are important to a student’s college choice as well, with 25% of participants revealing that their strength influenced their overall decision.
Discussion

An analysis of the data gathered via surveys allows for an understanding of application to the institution and its implications on recruiting efforts overall. In order to make sense of dense findings, I will highlight 3 conclusions that I drew by examining the data within the context of the current literature. First, students typically go through a specific process prior to applying to an institution as well as during the decision to attend a certain college. It can be hypothesized that this is because a need to feel “safe” exists, but also stems back to social identity theory and the need to reaffirm one’s current self-concept.

Second, the physical visit to a college campus is revealed to be a highly important aspect of the college search overall, more influential than new technological resources such as a website or social networking opportunity. This is because students look to reaffirm self-identity within future groups. Finally, the feeling of “fit” is important during a college search process and, at NCC specifically, friendliness is seen as the characteristic individuals identify most for themselves and for the campus culture overall.

The results reveal that students typically visit campus at least once prior to applying to North Central College, either through an individual visit or on a visit day. This is interesting in conjunction with the fact that 88% of current students are from in-state, meaning, for the majority of students, it would not take an extraordinary amount of time or effort to visit campus. This data reveals that many students attending NCC do not move far from home. Perhaps these students who are typically from within a 50 mile radius of campus visit before they apply to North Central because they have the capability to and are unwilling to invest in a school before

1 It is not known from this research if the trend of students visiting prior to applying is a causation or correlation of the fact that so many are from in-state. Further, it is not clear whether students from in-state more likely to come to North Central because they had the opportunity to easily be on campus prior to making a decision or are they more likely to visit North Central because of this.
they know it is one they believe they will feel comfortable at. Further, they may be unwilling to take the risk of attending a school that does not reaffirm their identity and so take steps, such as physically examining campus, in order to ensure the institutions “fit.”

It is interesting to consider whether the students have a need to feel “safe” about the school before applying, understanding all they can about it before deciding to let the school know of any interest. This can be understood within the construct of social identity theory. College is one of the first times a person has the chance to actually choose the group they want to be a member of for the following four years. Because individuals “maintain and enhance their self-esteem through their membership in social groups” (Saw & Okazaki, 2008, para. 1) it makes sense that high school seniors would search for a school where they are confident the community will fulfill this need. Further, self-categorization, according to social identity theory, allows students to analyze the in-group and out-group member’s identities in order to understand their own similarities and differences with each. All aspects of both a school’s identity, including the commonly held beliefs, attitudes, norms, and styles of speech present, are used to help a student determine if that institution “fits” their current identity. The way a student would have the opportunity to discover all of this, of course, is through interactions with people currently part of the in-group at an institution, or via a campus visit and tour. How the culture of North Central is explained to prospective students allows them to form complete opinions about the school and better understand if their individual identity will, in fact, be enhanced or reaffirmed through membership at the institution. It becomes obvious, then, why campus visits are not only so popular, but also so influential on prospective students.

Investigating how many schools students typically visit before deciding on a certain school, as well as knowing what students find particularly appealing about the school they
choose to attend, would be helpful in determining the necessary information to include on a
campus tour in order to encourage students to enroll. Although 81.9% of participants visited
NCC before applying, it is unknown whether this is the process they took for all schools they
applied to, and even if other schools were considered. If they did not, in fact, visit each school
prior to applying, what encouraged them to take this route considering North Central? Further, if
they did not apply to other schools, did students visit first and decide not to pursue that
institution further or were they only drawn to look at NCC from the beginning? While this does
not seem likely, it would be beneficial to understand how students first heard about this
institution and what about it compelled them to seek more information.

When asked to name the resources that most influenced their decision to attend North
Central, prospective students most frequently chose a tour of campus, again revealing that
physically being on campus is considered very important to understanding a school, and the
collective culture of its group identity. This reveals that North Central is accurate in placing a
significant amount of focus on training their student tour guides as well as providing tour days
for large amounts of prospective students and their families. What it also exposes, though, is that
prospective students place a large emphasis on the physical set-up of a campus and, perhaps,
how they “feel” on that campus on the particular day of their visit. The impact of this visit is that
it helps to determine whether a student will decide to attend North Central. This is revealed
throughout the survey, as even when students were asked when they made their decision to
attend North Central six of them answered in a way that nearly meant “immediately after
visiting.” Perhaps this feeling further discloses the power of social identity theory with these six
students immediately understanding that their own sense of self would be embraced and
choosing this community would be a “safe” choice because it already fit what they needed from a social identity.

Following campus visit, students felt their decision to attend North Central was most influenced by individual visits, attending a visit day, conversations about North Central with family, and, finally, the North Central website. We see that the top three most influential resources include being on campus in some way. It is interesting that conversations with family follows these in importance. This can be explained again when considering that 88% of students are from in-state. It is unclear whether we can assume family had a role in the choice students made to attend NCC and if perhaps family is influential on a student’s reason to attend a school relatively close to home. This could be true based on the understanding that family is a group a student is part of. If this influence exists, it helps to explain why size, location, and connections to people on campus were in the top qualitative answers to why NCC is a good “fit”: students who have developed an identity that defines family as important enough to play a part in their college decision-making process may also seek out a place where they will build similar relationships, thus maintaining their current social identity.

The data shows that so many students return to campus multiple times before returning as a student, at times even on multiple occasions prior to applying. This stresses the importance students put on making a decision based on their own interpretations of the campus identity in relation to what they believe they “need” out of a college in order to successfully choose the institution that best enhances their social identity. By the time students are beginning their college search, they are more than likely in the moratorium status and have already developed a strong self-concept. It is because of this that students will do anything they can to reinforce this
identity, including finding a group exhibiting the same characteristics they have come to appreciate.

Looking further at the qualitative information gained through the survey, or the questions where participants had the opportunity to explain an answer using their own words, reveals what students value about North Central overall and the reasons, perhaps, they chose to attend in the first place. Campus tours would not be so influential for prospective students if they did not come to campus and find a place that fulfilled their expectations of college. If they found themselves in an overall environment where they felt uncomfortable, a tour would, instead, deter them from a desire to apply.

Based on this assumption and looking to social identity theory, then, North Central’s campus, as well as the information given by the tour guide, must exhibit qualities which a prospective student sees their current identity fulfilled in. Each student must be able to see that the school’s overall identity will reinforce who they see themselves as already as well as encourage growth towards that student’s ideal identity characteristics. Is there a certain type of person, then, who would be interested in attending a school like North Central? Similarly, if the institution is selling itself to a certain type of student, is it fulfilling what it says it will over a student’s four year career? If it is not, but is instead providing other opportunities that students are actually happier with than if North Central had only fulfilled those promised, is it acceptable?

This is similar to the questions that arise because of the results showing that students own perceived identity is very similar to the identity they perceive the culture of the institution overall to inhibit.

It is interesting that students revealed the size of North Central to be part of why they “fit” at the institution more than any other characteristic. This emphasis and appreciation of the
“small campus” and “small class sizes” helps to further understand why students also frequently describe the school as “friendly.” The size of the institution shifts how friendly it is into focus because it is more likely that they personally know a greater number of people on campus, including staff, faculty, and students. Based on proximity people on campus are more likely to see one another and so they also have an increased chance of building relationships with a greater percentage of the existing population. If size remained the same, but the culture of campus took focus away from the benefits of networking and making connections across campus, or there was a greater appreciation for competition among students, the small size of the campus could actually feel like a negative characteristic for students. For example, if only the top academic students had access to certain opportunities or amenities, or there were for some reason fewer opportunities overall because of the small number of students relative to a large institution, students may dislike the limited access to opportunities.

Perhaps, again, it can be argued that student’s appreciation for the size of the school, with many participants focusing on how small it is, reveals that the demographic coming to NCC are looking for a “safe” place to attend. This idea of “safe” is not based on a lack of violence, but more as a place where they feel they can continue to reaffirm the identity they have developed throughout their teenage years. Perhaps students come from towns that are small, or where opportunity has been highly emphasized, and so they are looking for an institution that will perpetuate this focus. Again, a place could not be large and seen as friendly because of the lower percentage of the community where relationships have the chance to form. North Central encourages formation of personal relationships with faculty, staff, and students, in the way that it markets itself and in the culture overall.
The demographics of the current first-year class also provide evidence to the hypothesis that students were looking to reaffirm current identity when choosing North Central. The top 3 high schools that students come from, although not an extremely high percentage, are either from within Naperville or in Plainfield, one town to the south of Naperville. This means that the high schools with the largest amounts of students attending NCC are from the same community the college is housed within. Students from these schools could probably name a number of reasons for staying close to home, but the fact that it reaffirms the identity already developed, making it a “safe” choice, could add to the conversation of fit at the institution.

Furthermore, it is telling that a high percentage of students at NCC identify themselves as belonging to some form of Christianity. While North Central has a Methodist affiliation, it can be assumed that it will reaffirm the identity of individuals of any Christian faith. These high percentages of students who identify as Christian prior to enrollment were likely looking for a place where these values would be reaffirmed. Students can assume that Christian values they have already identified as important will be reaffirmed in the institution they attend.

It is important to point out the similarities between the characteristics many students chose as one’s which describe themselves and the characters many students used to describe North Central. 3 of the top 5 characteristics matched for each group of adjectives. Students perceive themselves similarly to how they perceive North Central’s culture overall. It is not clear when the perception of each became consistent. Perhaps these students chose North Central after doing their research, such as attending on campus visits, and found it to portray qualities similar to those they saw in themselves. On the other hand, this data could reveal that salience of the first year class at NCC has been achieved, with the students identifying themselves in a way that perpetuates the culture of the group overall. If this is true, I could not
assume that students would have chosen the same characteristics for themselves when in the midst of their college search.

To determine the timing of recognizing oneself as having the top 5 characteristics, further research could be done on prospective students to see if they identify themselves similarly during the college search, once they identified as future North Central students, and when they have been part of this group for nearly 6 months. If identity shifts among these times, it could be hypothesized that a student decides to “purchase” North Central because as a group it exhibits characteristics the student wishes to individually enhance.

If we assume that student’s identity has remained consistent since their college search, the data supports the hypothesis that prospective students “purchased” North Central as a means to reaffirm their own identity. This leads back to the apparent need for prospective students to North Central to feel “safe” as they do their college search.

This glimpse at how identity affects college choice could be explored deeper if the same survey were distributed to the same students in three years when they are seniors at North Central. I would compare student’s current answers with their future ones and determine how their perspective on their own identity as well as that of North Central has changed over time. It would be interesting to analyze if the perceived identity of self and of the college still match as closely as they do in the current data. Further, information on whether students have all together shifted in their perspective of the school, meaning perhaps they would no longer view the school as friendly but a large percentage would all characterize it as exhibiting some other quality. This would help to prove whether social identity theory still holds true if there is a shift in values and beliefs held. For example, if individuals in a social group continue to base decisions on the benefit of the whole group once saliency is reached, but those decisions are based on different
values than previously held within the group, would it still be considered the same social identity as previously?

Regarding identity, the characteristics students most chose to classify themselves, or friendly, dependable, kind, helpful, and achieving, are either commenting on their relation with others or their intrinsic drive. Specifically, these first four characteristics all comment on the ease they should have in developing relationships overall. Friendly and kind both refer to how a person treats another while dependable and helpful refer to actively doing something or making a choice to aid another. Further, the fact that participants often refer to themselves as “achieving” reveals that they have already developed an identity of themselves that includes an emphasis on academic intrinsic motivation and successful outcomes.

**Implications**

Overall this research has a few implications for North Central College. First of all, the way that North Central markets itself may need to be reconsidered. If students are looking for a place that reaffirms their existing identity, NCC needs to be sure that they have a clear understanding of the characteristics of students they would like to focus on recruiting. According to the data collected for this project, a large amount of students identity with similar attributes they feel the school exhibits, but this number has room for growth.

A consideration regarding marketing, however, is whether North Central is accurately portraying itself to its prospective students. Put in other words, is the culture of campus actually what marketing materials claim it to be? Do students, faculty, and staff accurately portray it to prospective students? Are there aspects of the institution that are not discussed because they are less than favorable and could turn away a prospective student? If it is being portrayed
incorrectly but could actually be to the benefit of a future student, is this communication behavior acceptable?

Future research for this project could move in many different directions. It would be helpful to determine why students chose North Central over other institutions very similar in size, location, and campus culture. This research would further develop an understanding of the identity of NCC’s students as well as how it is perceived overall. Regarding perception, further research could also generate information from prospective students who have not yet made the decision to enroll. This would provide a more unbiased look at how North Central is perceived while students are still in the college search phase and do not yet identify as a member of this group.

It would be interesting to discover if student’s perceptions of themselves and the institution’s identity overall would change over the four years in attendance at NCC. Perhaps students would no long identify themselves and the school as friendly, but both as a different characteristic. Another possibility would be that as time goes on and students have a better understanding overall of this group, they would no longer identify as closely with the institution. This information could be helpful as the admission office continues to market to prospective students the kind of school it is and also to understand the change students go through during their time as undergraduates.

As I began this project I hypothesized that new technology and resources available to prospective students would take precedence over face-to-face interaction and campus visits. Rather it seems that new resources, while they open the lines of communication, are not as influential as the traditional way to experience campus, its culture, and people. Further, it was
proven that self-concept of prospective students and its “fit” at a certain institution is highly influential throughout the college search and decision making process.
Works Cited


Appendix A

Survey ( surveymonkey.com was used to distribute the following survey)

1. Choose the words that describe you.

practical  understanding
persistent  energetic
careful  adventurous
introverted  conscientious
emotional  moderate
impulsive  insightful
athletic  popular
conforming  driving
achieving  powerful
confident  persistent
expressive  orderly
flexible  kind
rugged  cooperative
down-to-earth  ambitious
curious  persuasive
analytical  organized
imaginative  efficient
idealistic  friendly
stable  responsible
self-reliant  assertive
precise  competitive
intellectual  obedient
unordered  detailed
original  tactful
frank  enthusiastic
independent  dependable
creative  thorough
helpful

2. If you visited North Central College before applying, which type of activities did your visit include?

Did not visit NCC before applying
Individual Visit
Visit Day
Had tour of campus
Sat in on a class
Met with a coach
Stayed overnight on campus
Met with a professor
Attended athletic event on campus
Attended fine arts event on campus

3. If you did not visit North Central College before applying, which resources did you use to decide to apply to NCC?

Visited NCC before applying
North Central Website
Conversation(s) with friends
Conversation(s) with family
Call with Admission Counselor
Email with Admission Counselor
Call with Coach
Email with Coach
Call with current student
Email with current student
Materials in the mail
Met with college representative at local college fair
Met with college representative at high school

4. From the following, rank the top 5 resources that most influenced your decision to apply to North Central. (1 being the most helpful resource)

Individual Visit
Visit Day
Tour of campus
Sitting in on a class
Meeting with a coach
Staying overnight on campus
Meeting with a professor
Attending a sports event on campus
Attending a fine arts event on campus
North Central Website
Conversation(s) with friends
Conversation(s) with family
Call with Admission Counselor
Email with Admission Counselor
Call with Coach
Email with Coach
Call with current student
Email with current student
Postal materials
Meeting with college representative at local college fair
Meeting with college representative at high school
5. If you visited North Central after applying, which activities did your visit include?

Did not visit NCC after applying
Individual visit
Visit Day
Had a tour of campus
Sat in on a class
Met with a coach
Stayed overnight on campus
Met with a professor
Attended an athletic event on campus
Attended a fine arts event on campus

6. Choose the 5 resources that most influenced your decision to come to North Central.

Individual visit
Visit Day
Had a tour of campus
Sat in on a class
Met with a coach
Stayed overnight on campus
Met with a professor
Attended a sports event on campus
Attended a fine arts event on campus
North Central Website
Conversation(s) with friends
Conversation(s) with family
Call with Admission Counselor
Email with Admission Counselor
Call with Coach
Email with Coach
Call with current student
Email with current student
Postal materials
Met with college representative at local college fair
Met with college representative at high school

7. How many times did you visit campus before coming to Orientation?

1 visit
2-3 visits
4-5 visits
6 or more visits
8. Why did you choose to come to North Central College and when was this decision made?

9. Choose the words that describe North Central and its faculty, staff, students, and culture.

- practical
- persistent
- careful
- introverted
- emotional
- impulsive
- athletic
- conforming
- achieving
- confident
- expressive
- flexible
- rugged
- down-to-earth
- curious
- analytical
- imaginative
- idealistic
- stable
- self-reliant
- precise
- intellectual
- unordered
- original
- frank
- independent
- creative
- helpful

- understanding
- energetic
- adventurous
- conscientious
- moderate
- insightful
- popular
- driving
- powerful
- persistent
- orderly
- kind
- cooperative
- ambitious
- persuasive
- organized
- efficient
- friendly
- responsible
- assertive
- competitive
- obedient
- detailed
- tactful
- enthusiastic
- dependable
- thorough

10. Why did you feel NCC was a good fit for you?
Email to first-year students at North Central College

To: [Email]

From: dmcifonie@noctrl.edu

Subject: North Central Honor's Thesis Survey--Please Help!

Body: Hello! My name is Danielle Cifonie and I'm a senior at North Central. This year I am writing a thesis on how a student decides to attend a certain college and I'd love your help!

Please take a few minutes to fill out a quick survey. It asks about your college search and what helped you decide on NCC. Your response would be greatly appreciated.

Here is a link to the survey:
http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx

This link is uniquely tied to this survey and your email address. Please do not forward this message.

Thanks for your participation!

Please note: If you do not wish to receive further emails from me, please click the link below, and you will be automatically removed from the mailing list.
http://www.surveymonkey.com/optout.aspx
Appendix C

Adjectives used in survey taken from Pearson Education online career fit survey. (http://wps.prenhall.com/chet_sukiennik_careerfit_8/49/12561/3215852.cw/content/index.html)

**Describe Yourself**

Refer to the following list of adjectives:
practical; persistent; careful; introverted; emotional; impulsive; athletic; conforming; achieving; confident; expressive; flexible; rugged; down-to-earth; curious; analytical; imaginative; idealistic; stable; self-reliant; precise; intellectual; unordered; original; frank; independent; creative; helpful; understanding; energetic; adventurous; conscientious; moderate; insightful; popular; driving; powerful; persistent; orderly; kind; cooperative; ambitious; persuasive; organized; efficient; friendly; responsible; assertive; competitive; obedient; detailed; tactful; flirtatious; enthusiastic; dependable; thorough

*This activity contains 5 questions.*

1. List those adjectives that best describe you.

2. List those adjectives that are least like you.

3. Review the adjectives list in the test. Note the list is divided into six clusters: Realistic, Investigative, Artistic, Social, Enterprising, and Conventional (RIASEC). Referring to the adjectives you listed for each of the above, state which groups of adjectives best describe you.
Also note that most of the words are positive personality traits. This exercise gives you a chance to acknowledge your positive attributes. From which three of the six groups do most of your adjectives come? Rank the groups from which most of them come as 1, second most as 2, and third most as 3.

Each group of adjectives describes a certain kind of person. What kinds of people do you like to be around? Rank the top three types of people you like to be around.